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REMARKS

Favorable reconsideration of this application is requested in view of the above amendments and the following remarks.

Claim 8 has been cancelled without prejudice. Claims 1-3 have been amended. Claims 1-7 and 9-17 remain pending in this application. Claims 15-17 have been allowed.

Claim 3 has been corrected so that it ends in a period.

Claim 2 is rejected under 35 U.S.C. 112, second paragraph. Claim 2 has been amended so that "preferably" has been removed, rendering the rejection moot.

Claims 1-7 and 9-14 are rejected under 35 U.S.C. 103 (a) as being unpatentable over JP 63-328800 ('800). Applicants respectfully traverse this rejection to the extent it is maintained. The feature of claim 8 has been included in independent claim 1. Therefore this rejection is moot. Applicants do not concede the correctness of the rejection.

Claims 1-14 are rejected under 35 U.S.C. 103 (a) as being unpatentable over Alford et al. (U.S. Patent No. 6,610,623) ('623). Applicants respectfully traverse this rejection to the extent it is maintained.

The '623 patent does not lead one of ordinary skill to adding the specific combination of niobium oxide and copper oxide, or the specific combination of copper oxide, titanium oxide, and silver oxide to alumina. In the present invention, these combinations of additives provide the significant and unexpected advantage of a composition that can be prepared by sintering at temperatures not higher than 950 °C and have a relative density of not less than 90%. The '623 patent only discloses a number of different oxides that can be used alone or in various combinations. Nothing in the general disclosure or specific examples of the reference provides any focus on either of the specific combinations of oxides that are recited in claim 1. In fact the only use of any of the additives together in the reference is in the two samples of example 10, where titanium oxide and niobium oxides were used together in an undisclosed proportion with

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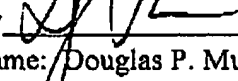
no suggestion at all that a composition suitable for low temperature sintering could be obtained. In fact, the sintering temperatures required in '623 is 1500°C to 1600°C, and therefore the compositions that are obtained by low temperature sintering of claim 1 clearly could not have been expected from the reference disclosure. Favorable consideration and withdrawal of the rejection are respectfully requested.

In view of the above, early issuance of a notice of allowance is solicited. Any questions regarding this communication can be directed to the undersigned attorney,

Respectfully submitted,

Hamre, Schumann,
Mueller & Larson, P.C.
P.O. Box 2902-0902
Minneapolis, MN 55402
Phone: 612-455-3800

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By 
Name: Douglas P. Mueller
Reg. No. 30,300
Customer No. 53148